MAHARASHTRA

# Maharashtra's Biggest Political Question Is Not Who Wins the Next Contest. It Is Whether the State Can Deliver.

*Five council seats are absorbing both alliances. Meanwhile, 265 talukas are in drought.*

ADITYA TOTADE · MUMBAI · 11 OCTOBER 2026

Maharashtra politics is rarely quiet. On 23 October, graduates and teachers will vote for five seats in the 78-member Legislative Council: three graduates' constituencies (Pune, Nagpur and Aurangabad, now Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar, divisions) and two teachers' (Pune and Amravati). Counting is on 27 October.

Nominations closed on 6 October and withdrawals on 9 October, and neither alliance came out tidy. In Pune's teachers' seat, the Shiv Sena's candidate pulled out only after the BJP's central leadership intervened. In Nagpur, a former BJP MLA is contesting as an independent against the party's official candidate. In the Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar graduates' seat, two Maha Vikas Aghadi partners, the Shiv Sena (UBT) and the NCP (SP), have fielded candidates against each other. Sixty-two people filed nominations for that one seat.

I do not think this is trivial. The upper house matters for legislation, and managing allies is what coalition government is; a government that cannot keep its partners in line will not last long. But I keep asking what the same effort would look like if it were pointed at the other thing happening in Maharashtra this month.

In early September the state declared drought in 265 talukas, about three-quarters of its total, after one of its driest monsoons in years. On 5 October the government ordered a minimum 10 per cent water cut from 16 October in every urban and rural local body, citing the deficient rain and the risk of El Niño stress running into next year. By 9 October, 611 tankers, 15 government-run and 596 private, were serving 517 villages and 2,147 hamlets across ten districts. The Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar division alone had 263 of them; Ahilyanagar had 153, Beed 111 and Solapur 98. That is a Marathwada-and-beyond problem, not a one-district one.

To be fair, the government's plan is more specific than most. It has mapped, dam by dam and use by use, how much water is available until 31 August 2027, with drinking water first, then livestock and fodder, and only then irrigation, starting with rabi food grains and fodder crops. Every reservoir keeps a 10 per cent emergency buffer, and joint squads

will patrol dams, rivers and canals to stop illegal extraction. A state that has thought about priority order is a state that is trying.

But look at the calendar. The water cut starts on 16 October. The vote is on 23 October. The plan runs to August 2027. One of those dates is organising political attention, and it is not the longest. Look at the map, too: the division with the most tankers is also the one where those 62 candidates are chasing a graduates' seat. That is coincidence, not cause. The graduates' electorate is not the village waiting for a tanker. But it shows how far apart the places where politics is intense and the places where the state is being tested can be.

What I would want to know is how the cut will be checked. A flat 10 per cent is easy to announce and easy to measure on paper. It bites very differently in a city with piped supply and in a village already waiting for a tanker. The government says availability will be reviewed regularly through guardian ministers and canal advisory committees. Will local-body compliance be published? The Water Supply and Sanitation Department's tanker report is already a measure; what I would like to see is the trend, week by week, rather than one day's count. And which districts will be able to show they are better off by next summer than they are now?

This is also about how Maharashtra works. A drought response runs through the water resources department, district collectors, municipal corporations, councils and gram panchayats. If any link breaks, the citizen experiences it as the failure of the whole state. Ministers can announce a plan from Mantralaya; they cannot deliver it from there.

Parties should contest elections, and allies will bargain over seats. That is democracy. I would just like at least one of Maharashtra's political competitions to be about outcomes. Citizens do not experience government through coalition arithmetic. On 24 October, the water cut will still be in force.